Touring the World Through Food

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Contact Information

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Course Description

Have you noticed that certain ingredients like okra are used in wildly distinct cuisines like in Cajun dishes and Indian dishes? Have you ever wondered why they are common across unrelated cuisines? In this course, we will take a deep dive into common fundamental ingredients and explore the cuisines and cultures that incorporate them. We will analyze what drives their usage in unrelated dishes to understand the fundamental question: **what is the essence that makes food taste good?**

Many ingredients are commonly used in different cuisines around the world. In this course, we will examine the building blocks of dishes and compare their uses across different cultures. Select ingredients will be introduced with a historical approach, highlighting how they have spread throughout the world. We will build on this foundation and discuss different cultures' preparation of these ingredients and how they are used in different dishes. This course aims to broaden students' perspectives of foods from different cultures. Students will learn to adapt a cultural and historical framework for understanding the history and preparation of food. Learning and assessment will center on participation in class discussions, reflective essays, and a final project synthesizing the knowledge of different cultures and cuisines. Prior experience cooking will be beneficial.

Learning Objectives

1. Describe the history behind certain ingredients and events that propagated their spread throughout the world
2. Analyze a dish and recognize the importance of its building blocks

3. Apply knowledge about ingredients by utilizing or experiencing it in a dish and culturally justifying your method of preparation for the dish
4. Compare and contrast the methods distinct cultures use to prepare the same ingredient to highlight the cultural differences

Texts and Materials

All suggested readings and supplementary materials are linked under the Course Schedule.

Grades and Assessments

Grading will be based on in-class participation, a reflection, discussion posts, and a final project:

Participation

Participation is required for all 8 classes, which are held every other week. See absence policy below.

Restaurant Trip Reflection

Students will be given opportunities to participate in restaurant trips and analyze key ingredients in the dishes they taste. In this 100-200 word reflection, students will draw parallels to other cuisines and highlight how key ingredients are utilized in different cuisines. Students will be expected to pay for the cost of their meal (~$15). Those with financial difficulties are encouraged to speak to the instructor, and these conversations will be completely confidential. An alternative assignment will be available for those who are unable to attend due to conflicts or constraints. Students must inform an instructor at least 1 week prior to the restaurant trip.

Biweekly Discussion Posts

For every week during which class is not held, an asynchronous discussion post will be opened on Canvas. In each post, students will reflect on content covered in previous classes and must comment under at least 1 other student's post. Prompts are posted under the Course Schedule.

Final Project

For the final project, students will have two options: prepare a dish or experience several distinct cultural dishes. If students choose the first option, students will form groups and prepare a dish using an ingredient taught over the course of this semester. Each team will present their dish to the instructors and detail and justify their preparation. Students will explain the history of the dish and its cultural significance. Students will be expected to pay for the cost of their dish. Those with

financial difficulties are encouraged to speak to the instructor, and these conversations will be completely confidential.

For option two, students will experience a dish from a cuisine they are unfamiliar with. Students can write a paper, blog, or create a vlog of their experience of the dish. Students should identify ingredients in their chosen dish and describe which cultures use this ingredient and compare and contrast their methods of preparation. More guidelines for this assignment will be provided in class.

Grading Policy

A satisfactory grade is given for a course grade of 70% or above.

- Participation: 15%
- Reflection: 20%
- Discussion posts (6): 30%
- Final project: 35%

Absence Policy

For each unexcused absence, 3% of the final course grade will be deducted. For an absence to be excused, please email or text one of us at least 1 day prior to the start of class and schedule office hours if necessary. Up to 2 excused absences are permitted.

Rice Honor Code

In this course, all students will be held to the standards of the Rice Honor Code, a code that you pledged to honor when you matriculated at this institution. If you are unfamiliar with the details of this code and how it is administered, you should consult the Honor System Handbook at http://honor.rice.edu/honor-system-handbook. This handbook outlines the University's expectations for the integrity of your academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process.

Disability Resource Center

If you have a documented disability or other condition that may affect academic performance you should: 1) make sure this documentation is on file with the Disability Resource Center (Allen Center, Room 111 / adarice@rice.edu / x5841) to determine the accommodations you need; and 2) talk with me to discuss your accommodation needs.

Syllabus Change Policy

This syllabus is only a guide for the course and is subject to change with advanced notice.

Course Schedule

Each class will last approximately 2 hours. For each class meeting, we will lecture on the ingredient for that day, its significance in select dishes, and its role and significance in its respective culture. Each class has pre-class material that students are encouraged to read or watch. Additionally, we will explain how the ingredient itself is an integral component of the flavor profile and the chemistry behind it. The second portion of each class will consist of a brief demonstration of preparing a select dish. Students will be able to assist in preparation of the dishes and reflect in the following discussion post.

1/12: Oil & Butter

Pre-class Reading: The History of Butter and the Hummus Wars

- Pesto & Hummus (Italian & Middle Eastern)
- Empanadas - Lard (South American)
- Ghee - Butter Chicken (Indian)

1/19: Discussion Post

- Do you agree with the low-fat trend in America?
- Describe the cause of the trend and what effects it had or still has on Americans

1/26: MSG

Pre-class Video: Is MSG bad for you?

- Pure MSG (East Asian)
- Tomatoes - Bolognese (Italian)
- Mushrooms Duxelle (French)

2/2: Discussion Post

- What were your perceptions of MSG before coming to class and why did your perceptions formed the way it did?

2/9: Okra

Pre-class reading: Discovery and Cultivation of Okra, History of Gumbo

- Gumbo (Cajun)
- Bhindi Masala (Indian)
- African Okra Stew (Ghanian)

2/16: Discussion Post

- Compare and contrast how okra is prepared in dishes ranging from Cajun, Indian, and Ghanian cuisines

2/23: Soybeans

Pre-class reading: Buddhism and Tofu, the Korean Minority in Japan

- Dubu jorim (Korean)
- Mapo tofu (Chinese)
- Soybean milk (Taiwanese)

3/2: Discussion Post

- Does tofu have the same impact in the cultures discussed last week, or do they have a slightly different meaning in Korean, Chinese, and Taiwanese cultures?

3/9: Eggs

Pre-class material: History of Egg Tarts

- French omelet (France)
- Shakshuka (Middle Eastern, North African)
- Egg tarts (Portuguese, Chinese)

3/23: Noodles & Pasta

Recommended Reading: Did Pasta Come From China?, the Origin of Noodles

- Makguksu (Korean)
- Pancit (Filipino)
- Fideuà (Spanish)

3/30: Discussion Post

- Compare and contrast the symbolism of pasta and noodles in various cultures, or:
- Select a pasta name and explain its history. Compare its cultural significance to the significance of noodles in China.

4/6: Breads

Pre-class reading: The History of Kosher, History of Bread

- Babka (Jewish)
- Brioche (French)
- Pita (Mediterranean)

4/13: Discussion Post

- Compare and contrast a bread that uses leavening in its preparation and one that doesn't
- Why do some breads use yeast while others use baking powder? How did different dishes come to select a method for leavening bread?

4/20: Final Project

- Teams of three will present their final project